



Report from the Three Seminars on Contemporary Music with Connection to the ISCM World Music Days in Copenhagen, 1996

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KEYWORDS: ISCM, Boulez, *Pli selon Pli*—*Portrait de Mallarme*, Erling Gulbrandsen, IRCAM, Georgina Born

ABSTRACT: University of Copenhagen, Department of Musicology hosted a three-day series of lectures in conjunction with the ISCM World Music Days in Copenhagen 1996. The unifying thread running through all seminars was institutionalization of the avant-garde and the concept of pluralism. Of particular interest from a theoretical perspective was the presentation of Norwegian young scholar Erling Gulbrandsen's recent doctoral dissertation on Boulez's *Pli selon Pli*.

[1] The ISCM World Music Days is an annual festival for contemporary music and this year's event was held in Copenhagen, the 1996 Cultural Capital City of Europe, September 7–14. In conjunction with the festival, the University of Copenhagen's Department of Musicology hosted a three-day series of lectures featuring Georgina Born (London): "Pierre Boulez's IRCAM. Institution, History, and the Situation of Contemporary Music Today"; Erling Gulbrandsen (Oslo): "New Light on Pierre Boulez and Postwar Modernism"; Reinhard Oehlschlagel (Cologne): "Institutions of New Music: Development, Typology, Problems"; shorter papers were read by a panel including Per O. Broman (Uppsala), Erik Wallrup (Stockholm) Jens Hesselager (Copenhagen), Steen K. Nielsen (Aarhus), and Per F. Broman (Stockholm) and were followed by a discussion. This final session was chaired by Soren Moller Sorensen (Copenhagen).

[2] Georgina Born's presentation consisted of a brief review of her recent book *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avantgarde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), followed by a new, more elaborate discussion of the cultural policy for supporting composers—a topic hinted at in the final chapter of her book. She argued that big institutions might not be the best way to support composers, that instead scholarships for longer periods of time, maybe for ten years, should be granted. Reinhard Oehlschlagel provided a much more positive description of the present situation in which the contemporary musical institutions (sometimes, according to his definition, consisting of only two persons) contribute to a pluralistic musical discourse.

[3] Of particular interest from theoretical perspectives was Erling Gulbrandsen's recent doctoral dissertation on Boulez's *Pli selon Pli*. Based on archive studies, done at the Paul Sacher Stiftung (Basel), of the sketches and of a work that Boulez had rejected, the author traces the work's pitch structures. Although Gulbrandsen spent much time performing detailed archive

studies that revealed much of the work's organization, he selected to emphasize the "important role of free choice and unpredictability in the process of composition, strongly indicating the deeper kinship not only with the poetics of Mallarme, but with the romantic-aesthetic categories of judgment, taste, musical articulation, and play."

[4] The panel of final day's session "Pluralism—the Cultural Condition," presented critical papers on the institutions of ISCM (Jens Hesselager) and Darmstadt (Per F. Broman). There were also presentations focusing on the alternative aesthetics challenging the modernist traditions: Per O. Broman's reading of electro-acoustic music as a musical subculture with strong affiliation to popular "industry-music"; and Erik Wallrup's and Steen Nielsen's presentations of works and aesthetics by non-mainstream composers such as Karin Rehnqvist, Michael Nyman, and Steve Martland. The ensuing discussion illustrated the difficulties surrounding the concept of pluralism. The participants could not even agree on any consensus in regard to the use of the term, and, indeed, the debate illustrated Soren Moller Sorensen's introductory words: "Pluralism is more than just a truce between conflicting positions and laissez-faire attitudes in political, ethical and aesthetic affairs. To learn to live with pluralism is to learn to live in a world that can no longer be meaningfully organized around a central hub of 'natural' authority."

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